DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 748 JC 840 308

AUTHOR Mitchell, Grace N.
TITLE The Reverse Transfer, Lateral Transfer and First Time Community College Student: A Comparative Study.
PUB DATE Feb 84
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Freshmen; *College Transfer Students; Dropouts; Enrollment Influences; *Student Characteristics; *Student Educational Objectives; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Lateral Transfer Students; *Reverse Transfer Students

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide information on the educational, economic, and personal characteristics of students in the Los Rios Community College District (California) and to compare the characteristics of first-time students (FTS); students who transferred from other community colleges, including noncompleter lateral transfer students (NCLT) and completer lateral transfer students (CLT); and students who transferred from four-year institutions, including non-completer reverse transfer students (NCRT) and completer reverse transfer students (CRT). Questionnaires requesting information on students' demographic and educational characteristics, and reasons for attending college and for leaving their previous institution were completed by 10,196 students in the district. Study findings included the following: (1) the sample was 51% female, 30% minority, and evenly divided among three age groups (under 21, 22 to 30, and over 30); (2) 54.7% of the sample were first-time students, 25.7% were lateral transfer students, and 19.6% were reverse transfer students; (3) the FTS group reported taking more units than any other group and had the lowest grade point average; (4) the educational objectives of the CRT group were primarily occupational in nature, while the FTS and NCRT groups listed objectives related to transfer preparation, cost, personal growth, and occupational preparation; and (5) NCLT students left their previous institution for reasons related to mobility, while NCRT students listed academic reasons more frequently. (AYC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED245748

The Reverse Transfer, Lateral Transfer and First Time Community College Student: A Comparative Study

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Mitchell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Dr. Grace N. Mitchell
February 1984

American River College
Los Rios Community College District
1919 Spanos Court, Sacramento, CA 95825

JC 840 368

For more information on the study contact:

Dr. Grace N. Mitchell
American River College
4700 College Oak Drive
Sacramento, California 95841
(916) 484-8101

THE REVERSE TRANSFER, LATERAL TRANSFER AND FIRST TIME COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Community colleges in California, along with those in the rest of the nation, have changed dramatically in the years since the end of World War II (Carnegie, 1980). They have experienced rapidly increasing enrollments, a change in the type of student enrolling, and more recently, a financial crisis of major proportions (Deletion, 1982). The "new" student enrolling is no longer only the traditional eighteen year old recently graduated from high school, attending full-time with an intent to transfer to a senior institution after two years at a community college (Cross, 1979). Among these "new students" are an increasing number of "reverse" and "lateral transfers", students who have had previous college experience at four or other two-year institutions.

Critics of the community college contend that the two-year colleges are not doing a good job of producing transfers to the four-year colleges. Some criticisms include the charge that colleges fail to retain students and that students fail to complete programs (Rx, 1982). A counter argument is that the dropout behavior of many students may not be an indication of failure, but consists of other factors (Sheldon, 1982), such as indecision about educational goals or completion of short-range goals for which the student enrolled in the college.

Long range studies of attrition, centering on the definition of "dropouts", have found many students who could be defined as "persisters" and who complete college work after a longer period of time. Among these persisters, have been identified groups of "reverse" or "lateral" transfer students who persist at completing their educational goals, moving from one college to another in the process (Kirby, 1977; Kissler, 1980).

Although the literature on the "reverse" and "lateral" transfer student has not been extensive, these special groups of students have been recognized to be growing in numbers. Descriptions show them to be older, married, more employed, enrolled for multiple reasons, many of them occupationally-related. Their reasons for leaving and attending are often related to changes in their personal or work lives rather than to academic concerns.

Research on attrition concludes that students leave for a multitude of reasons. Although efforts have been made to predict student dropout behavior, very little of that behavior can actually be predicted (Bianchi, 1980). Many studies have been limited to narrow samples and few factors. A notable exception is Astin's study (1975) which found 53 variables contributing to the prediction of dropout. Research continues to suggest that multi-institutional studies be conducted which would begin to define and

describe reasons why students drop out, with further research needed to assist colleges in understanding the complexity of their heterogenous student populations (Cohen & Brawer, 1970). Because most attrition research is not generalizable, individual institutional research on attrition has also been recommended (Hutchison & Johnson, 1980).

Since the student transferring to the community college is increasing in number, serving this population has become a major function. Understanding the characteristics of these students and their reasons for enrolling is important to the community colleges (Swedler, 1981).

This study was conducted to provide information on the educational, economic, and personal characteristics of students in the Los Rios Community College District (California) and their reasons for enrolling and leaving college. Sub-groups of students with previous college experience were identified, described, and analyzed according to their previous college experience.

Methods

The sample of students used in this study was drawn from the student population of the Los Rios Community College District, which includes three colleges: American River College, Cosumnes River College, and Sacramento City College, thought to be representative of many colleges throughout the California Community Colleges system.

To determine the representativeness of the sample, it was compared to the district's student population and to the statewide community college student population. SPSS and DAISY programs were used to perform the statistical anaylsis of collected data.

The questionnaire used in the study was designed with the assistance of many researchers in the state and was field tested before administration to students in selected credit classes in the three Los Rios colleges.

Students were asked to answer questions concerning their demographic and educational characteristics. Responses to the items concerning their previous educational experience were used to divide the students into sub-groups for further study. These sub-groups were then analyzed and compared.

Friedman's two-way analysis of variance was computed in order to understand the relative ranking of the reasons for leaving. In order to determine if the reasons for attending fell into patterns which might be further analyzed in the future, a factor analysis of each group's reasons was computed.

Findings

A sample of 10,196 credit students in the Los Rios community College District responded to the questionnaire.

Examination of the characteristics of the sample showed that it included 51 percent female students, 30 percent minorities and that it was evenly divided among students in three age groups: 35 percent under 21 years of age, 35 percent from 22 to 30 years of age, and 30 percent over the age of 30.

Although some statistically significant differences were found among the sample, the District student population, and the statewide community college population, it was possible to conclude from the raw data that the sample appeared to be representative of community college students within the state.

Based on the students' previous college experience, five study groups were identified from the sample. They were designated as follows: (a) FTS--First Time Students, (b) NCLT--Noncompleter Lateral Transfer Students, (c) CLT--Completer Lateral Transfer Students, (d) NCRT--Noncompleter Reverse Transfer Students, and (e) CRT--Completer Reverse Transfer Students.

The First Time Student (FTS) constituted 54.7 percent of the study sample. The groups of students with previous two-year college experience (NCLT and CLT) made up the next largest group with 25.7 percent (19.2 percent and 7.5 percent, respectively). The Reverse Transfer students made up 19.6 percent of the sample (NCRT, 12 percent; CRT, 7.6 percent).

Analysis of the personal characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, marital status, dependents) of the five groups showed that the largest relative differences were found between the CRT and FTS groups. The CRT students were older, male, white, married, and had more dependents. The other three groups (NCLT, CLT, NCRT) resembled each other and were at a point somewhere between the CRT and FTS groups. For example, they were older than the FTS, but younger than the CRT.

The pattern revealed in the examination of the personal characteristics of the five groups was repeated when economic characteristics were analyzed. That is, the largest descriptive differences were found between the CRT and FTS groups, with more CRT students employed and working more hours per week. Financial support from similar sources--wages from employment--were cited in the case of both the FTS student and the CRT; however, the FTS group showed the highest percentage receiving support from parents. The NCLT, CLT, and NCRT groups showed the least relative differences.

A comparison of educational experiences and aspirations completed the analysis. The First Time Students (FTS) reported taking more units than any other group and contrasted most with the CRT group. The FTS had the lowest grade point average, the CRT group the highest. The combination groups were again midway between the other two. The one exception was the CLT group, which reported having completed the highest number of units probably indicating that graduates of the colleges had stayed on to pursue further educational goals.

Full- and part-time status was studied for all five groups. The largest relative difference again emerged between the FTS and CRT groups.

Differences were found among the three combination groups, but were statistically insignificant. The sample showed a higher percentage of full-time students than shown by either the District or statewide student population.

Factors Explaining College Attendance

Analyses of the reasons students reported for attending showed the four year graduates (CRT) to be unique. Three of the four reasons listed most frequently were occupational in nature. The reason "personal growth and interest" was also among those cited as "very important." This combination of responses suggested that the interpretation of the item "personal growth and interest" required further clarification.

The First Time Students (FTS) and the Noncompleter Reverse Transfer (NCRT) resembled each other with regard to their reported reasons for attending, listing reasons related to transfer preparation, cost, personal growth and occupational preparation most frequently. The two groups transferring from two-year colleges (NCLT, CLT), also resembled each other, listing "no tuition" and occupational reasons most often, followed by "personal growth."

When a factor analysis of reasons for attending was conducted, individual reasons which had been ranked high, when combined with other reasons to form related factors, changed in importance (Table 1). Factors related to job training, location, low cost, lack of admissions requirements, and the influence of others emerged as important. "Personal growth and interest," which had ranked among the most important individual reasons, remained important for three groups, but was combined with the improvement of basic skills or job skills. For the two reverse transfer groups, however, the personal growth factor was among the least important.

Preparation to transfer, which had been listed as important by the FTS and NCRT groups, did not appear as an important factor. When considered in comparison to other factors related to job preparation, costs, convenience and college reputation, transfer preparation dropped to nearly least important for these two groups. It remained relatively unimportant for the two groups of Lateral Transfers and for the Completer Reverse Transfer Students (CRT).

Reasons For Leaving

Two groups of students, noncompleters from previous two- and four-year institutions (NCLT and NCRT), were used in the analysis of the reasons students reported for leaving colleges.

Examination of the descriptive data showed that students leaving two-year colleges cited reasons related to mobility, such as "moved out of area," more often than items related to academic concerns, such as "undicided major." Students previously attending four-year colleges tended to

Table 1

Factors Explaining College Attendance
Top Five Factors
Five Study Groups

Factors:* Ranks	First-Time Students (FTS)	Noncompleter Lateral Transfer	Completer Lateral Transfer (CLT)	Noncompleter Reverse Transfer	Completer Reverse Transfer (CRT)
1	Job improvement	All reasons combined	Job skills, training, change	Low cost, admissions req'ts	Job training, change, search
2	College faculty, reputation	Influence of parents/friends	Self-confidence/ growth	Job skills, change	Low cost, admissions req'ts
3	Job training/ search	Low cost, admissions req'ts	Basic skills/ self-confidence/ growth	College location	Influence of friends/parents
4	Career search self-confidence/ growth	Basic skills/ self-confidence/ growth	College faculty reputation	College faculty/ reputation	Job improvement/ program availability
5	College location	College location	Meet people/ others influence	All reasons combined	College faculty/ reputation

*Each factor includes one or more reasons.

list academic-related reasons more often, such as "undecided major" and "changed goal." Although the groups both listed academic and personal reasons for leaving more frequently than other reasons, the order in which they listed them was reversed.

Statistically significant differences were found when comparing the two groups according to individual reasons, with the NCRT group listing reasons related to academic matters, costs of the college, and items critical of the previous institutions significantly more often than the NCLT group. The NCLT group listed reasons related to mobility and short-range educational goals significantly more often.

Discussion

It was possible to conclude that the description and analysis of students based on their previous college experience confirmed the results of previous studies which had identified and described groups of reverse and lateral transfer students. These groups have goals and needs different from those of the traditional first-time student.

Many reverse and lateral transfer students report coming to the community college for reasons which are related to traditional characteristics of the colleges--low cost, lack of admissions requirements, college/faculty reputation, and convenient location. Their reasons appear not to be consistent with one of the traditional community college functions (transfer education), while strongly related to another traditional function (vocational education).

Students who have not completed a degree leave four-year colleges for reasons which are different from those given by students who leave two-year colleges. The latter more often report reasons which are beyond the control of the colleges or which indicate that students have achieved their short-range goals prior to completion of a degree.

Implications for Practice

Because of the diverse nature of California community colleges, research on the reverse and lateral transfer student should be conducted both by individual colleges and by groups of colleges using identical methodology in order to produce comparable data. (Comparable studies have been conducted by Long Beach City College and Cerritos College.)

Colleges should identify and analyze both reverse and lateral transfer student groups as they enter in order to develop appropriate services and programs for those students. These students' reasons for attending college and for leaving previous colleges should be ascertained in order to develop intervention guidance models and to improve student learning and goal attainment.

Because many of the students appear to enter colleges with short-range, occupationally related goals and leave when those goals are reached, community colleges should examine the structure of their vocational programs for possible revision to more flexible, short-term, or other appropriate formats.

Finally, examination of the attendance factors in this study indicate a need for community colleges to re-examine one of their traditional functions--transfer education--in an effort to determine whether programs meet current students' needs.

REFERENCES

Astin, A.W. Preventing students from dropping out. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

Bianchi, J.R. The prediction of voluntary withdrawals from college: An unsolved problem. Journal of Experimental Education, 1980, 49, 29-33.

The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. Three thousand futures. The next twenty years for higher education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

Cohen, A.M. & Brawer, F.B. Student characteristics: Personality and dropout propensity. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, March 1970.

Cross P.K. Responding to learning needs. In L.W. Jones & F.A. Nowotny (Eds.), New Directions for Higher Education (Vol. VII, No. 4). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

Deletion of selected credit and noncredit courses from the curriculum. Report to the Legislature. Sacramento: Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges, August, 1982.

Hutchison, J.E. & Johnson, A.E., Jr. Identifying persisters, voluntary withdrawals and acedemic dropouts at a liberal arts college. NASPA Journal, 1980, 18(2), 41-45.

Kirby, E.B. Reverse and lateral transfers at Oakton Community College, 1971-1977. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED (144661).

Kissler, G.R. Trends affecting undergraduate education in the University of California. Presentatiaon to the Board of Regents of the University of California, Committee on Educational Policy, October 16, 1980.

Mitchell-Berg, G.N. The reverse transfer, lateral transfer, and first-time community college student: A comparative study. Dissertation. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, February, 1984.

Rx for community colleges. Editorial, San Jose Mercury, January, 1982.

Sheldon, M.S. Statewide longitudinal study. 1978-1981. Final report. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Pierce College, 1982.

Swedler, J.A. A study of reverse transfers who entered Northern Illinois University during 1975-76: An analysis of their academic progress. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University, November, 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. Ed 210084).

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

12 AUG 3 1984